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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Paul Caillet

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

I always enjoy it when New England gets hit with snow, but only when it lands Boston and southward! Most winters, we get blasted with storm after storm, and the south of Boston rarely gets much, if any. This winter, and this week again, they got walloped again! I have friends down on Cape Cod who always brag how they're playing golf in January and February - but not this year! Sure, it continues to be cold up here, but the fact that they're getting snow "down south" gives me a warm feeling! I have to admit, though, that I am starting to come down with Spring Fever. I can't wait to be able to spend some time outside without worrying about wearing 3-4 layers of clothing just to go out and get the newspaper! Soon enough, I guess. The days are getting longer; and that's a good sign.

So, what's with all of these viruses and worms lately? I know, as I said last week, if you play it smart, you really shouldn't have to worry about such things. But, the fact that they are so proliferate these days is disturbing. Does bringing down computer networks really cause that much of a thrill? Do spammers really need to hack into people's computers just to be able to be able to spread their ridiculous messages? It's really getting absurd.

Until next time...

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ST Magazine Published in English

Hello,

At long last! It is at last eventually available! ST Magazine issue 132 is the first ST Magazine published in English. You will find here all the articles published in its French counterpart: CT060, Arany, GFA punch, demos, shareware, etc. The colour front and the back covers leave a huge part to screen captures. The rest is black and white. The reprography is almost professional quality. You want to order it ? You just have to send 5 EUR, carriage paid.

More information on <http://stmagazine.org>

Thanks :-)
Paul CAILLET

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. If you remember, last week I was kind of casting about, looking for something to complain about here in these few opening paragraphs.

Well, as someone once said, "I'm back, baby!"

It's amazing how much better I feel when I've got a purpose; when I've got a reason to put some thoughts down on paper. It works out well in this case too, because it's another one of my pet peeves: Stupid people.

I had to go to a wake last week. It wasn't for anyone I was close to. It was for a relative of a friend, so I was not attached to the departed. I went to the wake to show my respect and my friendship.

While I was standing in the line, waiting to file past the casket and pay my respects to the family, I had occasion to listen to two of the people behind me who were talking. One of them was a 'man of the cloth'. I'm not going to mention what denomination he might have been because it has nothing to do with the circumstances.

The gentleman that he was talking to was saying that his sister-in-law had just been diagnosed with lupus.

"Oh, lupus is a terrible disease", began the holy man, "it's actually a type of slow growing cancer".

That sent a chill down my spine. I don't know a lot about lupus, but I DO know that it's not a type of cancer.

"The doctor said something about the immune system, I think", said the other guy.

"Nope. It's cancer", said the man of the cloth.

"Well, if you say so", said the other man.

I had all I could do to keep from turning around and whacking the know-it-all. And after I thought about it for a minute, I wanted to kick the other guy too.

I mean, I may not agree with a priest, minister or rabbi about religion, but I take for granted that they know what they're talking about in that

realm. I don't place a lot of confidence in medical information from anyone other than a medical professional. It just makes sense to me.

But all around me I see people listening to people with no expertise in the subject they're talking about... and lapping it up, taking it as... well, as gospel. (Sorry, I couldn't resist)

And it's not confined to any particular profession or vocation. It's all over the place.

I wondered if it might be all in my head, if I was constructing things to complain about. But then I thought of all the times that people I know have come up to me and asked questions that no one with a brain would expect me to talk intelligently about.

I try to be honest with others... and with myself. I know that I don't always succeed, but I try. If I don't know the answer to a question, I simply say "I don't know".

You'd think that this simple response would be the last word, wouldn't you? Well more and more often I find that people don't even skip a beat and just ask the question again... like I'm hiding something from them or something.

On occasion I don't know the answer but have an idea of where to look to find it, and try to impart that knowledge to them. Most of the time they ignore it. It's more work than they had anticipated, and it's easier to pummel me with questions that I've already told them that I don't know the answer to.

Yes, friends and neighbors, I think it's time to start thinning out the herd. Perhaps I'll start telling people that the answer to their problem is to jump off of the nearest cliff.

I'd be willing to bet that a lot of them would then ask me for directions. <grin>

Well, let's get to the news and stuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st Newsgroup
=====

Joseph Place asks for help with is ailing Falcon:

"I have a Falcon with a CT60. All was well except for some disk corruption problems when using the CT60, so I decided to remove my clock patch and do the installation with solders. I must have damaged something, as with or without the CT60 I get horizontal scrolling lines when I boot most of the time. When I can get it to boot to the desktop, Aniplayer will not play video as it did before. It says "out of CVID memory." I've tested a few other things and they did work as normal. I reverted the installation back to where it was before (removed the ribbon cable and re-connected everything) but I still get the same result. I've checked and re-checked the motherboard several times, and I can't see any physical problems. Does anyone have an idea what may be wrong? Rodolphe Czuba has been very helpful, but I think I've exhausted all my options unless I send the motherboard to him. I'm looking for a replacement, but I'd like to have my original

board repaired. Please help!"

Mark Duckworth tells Joseph:

"As an intermediate step, you could send the motherboard to me. I'm assuming you live in the US, as I vaguely thought you did. What good would this be? Well I can swap chips here and there and see if I can find a bad one. Problem is videl and stuff aren't socketed so can't fix them. But with a good falcon right beside me and what is amounting to be a lot of hardship in getting my ct60/falcon running as well as the skill to get it running at 25MHz and install the solders with no problem (well remaining ST-ram access problem on my falcon that isn't my fault), I might be able to help you with something. To be perfectly honest, it sounds as if you fried a clock that deals with video and system. Some parts of the system can run at this distorted or broken clock rate, other parts cannot (crashes), and some obvious signs are present like broken video sync rates.

I have many of the clocks socketed or otherwise to try. Also upon removal you could have damaged the solder joint of the main ct60 clock pad. I'm reasonably confident your falcon isn't screwed beyond simple repair, but instead is in need of some rodolphe style assistance. I can do the next best thing - swapping things here and there to see if I can get it running properly, plus I can install your 20/25Mhz clock and you'll be good to go.

Rodolphe charges 60EUR for the job. I'll charge \$10USD + shipping. Keep in mind, my job is not done with the absolute precision that rodolphe's is (I do have an excellent ESD safe soldering station though), and I am not quite as "tuned to the falcon" as he is. Many people report strange enhancements on their boards after they return from Rodolphe, to settle final strange quirks that many falcons can have here or there. TBH it's better to send it to him, I'm just offering my help if you want it. Also my falcon's overclock turned out perfect but I cannot offer any kind of warranty. If I b0rk your falcon further, it can't be my problem. I don't have any spare falcons nor spare cash But I can assure you, I will be 500% more careful with your falcon than I was with mine.

With all that crap said, it's up to you what you want to do. First thing I would check is clocks!, but ask Rodolphe, he's the professional."

'Chris' asks about a hack he found in his STE:

"I have a STE with a 74LS164 soldered on top of U211, there are 2 wires, one of which goes to U203 pin 19 (and lifted form the track under it) of the MC68901 another wire goes to pin 22 U202 (YM2149), i'm thinking it could be some serial boost mod, though i've not seen one like that before..... anyone got any ideas ?"

Lyndon Amsdon tells Chris:

"If it's what I think it is, it's near the SIMM sockets. It was on some STE's, others (later ones?) had it on the motherboard as it should be.

Can't remember what it was for, look on the schematics, I think there is a note on them about this chip."

Chris replies:

"It is in front of the simm sockets. one chip is dated 1988 so its a older machine. I have another STE which is 1991 which has 3 chips on board and not 2, so it looks like your right about that. I can't see too well what its for, might be something to do with some reset or init 're-think'."

A Walshe asks about formatting a removable drive:

"I recently was given a SCSI 88 Meg SyQuest drive which and some 44 meg cartridges (I'm assuming they are compatible). My problem is that I cannot format the carts. HDDriver Ver. 6 recognizes the drive and is able to do a sector test successfully, and TOS recognizes 4 partitions (using install devices) and attempts to access the drive (the drive led flashes) when double clicking on the drive icons. I have tried what I assume is the copy protection red disk in both positions and that doesn't help. I am running and Atari TT.

Any ideas to help solve the problem would be appreciated."

'PuffPuffin' asks A:

"What model of the Syquest 88MB drive do you have?

The original Syquest 88MB drive could only *read* 44MB cartridges.

The later Syquest 88MB C (Note the "C"!) could read, write and format 44MB cartridges.

The label on the front should say "88 MB" or "88 MB C". So you should be able to tell which drive you have."

A Walshe tells Puff:

"Well that explains it! is a 88 Meg model without the "C". I'll have to find some 88 Meg Carts for it.

Thanks every body for your help, it is most appreciated!"

Maurits van de Kamp adds:

"Formatting shouldn't be necessary.. but have you tried to just repartition it?"

The Walshe-meister tells Maurits:

"Yes I did try to repartition it but with no success. May be I wasn't doing something correctly? I'll try again!"

Lonny Pursell jumps in and reminds him:

"Make sure the 44mb cart is not write protected. On the bottom side of the

larger size carts is a silver thing that slides back and forth. I assume these have this also, if so try flipping this small silver switch."

Richard Anderson reminds Lonny:

"On the 44's it is a rotating "thumbscrew". On my carts they are red. If red shows at the label edge of the cart, it is protected."

Kenneth Medin adds:

"I had similar problems with a Conner 40 MB HD in my Stacy. HDDDriver8 could not partition or format it. Reverted to AHDI and it partitioned just fine. Then installed HDDDriver on it and now it runs just fine. Uwe Seimet claimed HDDDriver should be able to do the partition but it simply did not work here."

When someone (Sam F., I think) asks about networking a C-Lab Falcon, Julian Wolfe replies:

"Frankly, I'd just go to <http://hardware.atari.org> and order a complete built EtherNEC device for \$75 shipped. It's easy to set up on whatever your OS of choice is, and works flawlessly.

You have to think in terms of what your time is worth. This is the quickest and most stable solution."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when....

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Teen Video Games May Have Sex, Profanity

Many teen-rated video games contain content that is not listed on the label, including sexual themes, alcohol and profanity, a study found.

Given the results, parents should be aware that popular T-rated video games might include a wide range of unexpected content that could have a negative influence on their children, said Harvard University researchers Kevin Haninger and Kimberly Thompson.

The current voluntary rating system "is not providing complete information to parents," Haninger said. "In many games there's content we think parents would care about."

The authors reviewed labels on all 396 mainstream T-rated video games available as of April 2001, and watched a random sample of 81 games. Violence was listed in content labels on 373 games, or 94 percent; 15 percent were labeled as having sexual themes; 14 percent were labeled for profanity; and 2 percent were labeled for depicting substances such as tobacco or alcohol.

Among the sample the researchers viewed, 20 percent of games with sexual content including partial nudity listed that content on the label; 17 percent of games with profanity listed it on the label; and just 1 percent of games with depictions of tobacco or alcohol listed that on the label.

The study appears in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

The findings point to a need for a clear explanation of the rating process, the researchers said.

Under the rating system used by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, games labeled "T" for teen are deemed suitable for youngsters aged 13 and up and may contain violence, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

Other ratings include "E" for everyone, "M" for mature and "AO" for adults only.

The system also includes brief content depictions labeled on the game box. These include things like blood and gore, cartoon violence, drug reference and partial nudity.

In response to the study, the ESRB issued a statement saying that independent research has shown that parents "overwhelmingly agree" with the board's ratings.

The board said the study is based on the authors' subjective observations that "are certainly not more valid than the decisions made by the three specially trained raters who carefully evaluate each game submitted to the ESRB."

Microsoft Planning New Xbox Live Features

Microsoft Corp. is planning a number of new features for its Xbox Live online gaming service this year, including limited data storage on its network, the company said on Friday.

Code-named "Tsunami," the new set of features is still in the planning stage and are expected to roll out gradually over the course of the year, Microsoft said.

But the list of services in development gives a preview as to what the company has planned for its Live service, which has more than 750,000 subscribers worldwide.

Among the features listed in an email from the company was something called "title-managed online storage," a way for game players to store and share data via Microsoft's network.

There has been speculation within the industry that Microsoft may not include a hard drive in the next version of the Xbox console, in favor of network-based storage that would reduce the console's physical size and cost.

Other enhancements in the works, Microsoft said, include the ability for game publishers or group of players to create competitions for specific games and new ways to contact friends to play games through the MSN Messenger instant-messaging software.

Buzz about the "Tsunami" features began to circulate on the Internet this week after some of the improvements were said to be revealed in a software development kit for Xbox Live.

Though Microsoft did not say anything about a voice-messaging feature, gaming sites reporting on "Tsunami" said there were indications from files in the kit that Xbox Live would eventually allow players to leave each other brief voice messages.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Bagle E-Mail Worm Spreads

Antivirus software companies are warning of a new computer virus that spreads using e-mail messages and installs a Trojan horse program on machines it infects.

The virus, named Bagle.B, is a new version of a similar e-mail worm that appeared in January and is programmed to spread until February 25, 2004. Antivirus companies say that Bagle.B is spreading rapidly on the Internet and are advising customers to update their antivirus software to spot it.

Like its predecessor, Bagle.B arrives in e-mail messages with randomly generated subject lines. The virus is stored in an e-mail file attachment, also with a randomly generated name, says antivirus company F-Secure of Helsinki.

E-mail recipients who open the file attachment launch the virus, which collects e-mail addresses from files on the infected machine's hard drive and forwards copies of itself to those addresses with a false address in the "From:" field, says antivirus company Sophos.

The worm also opens the Microsoft Windows Sound Recorder, which uses the file name "sndrec32.exe," Symantec says.

Users who launch the virus also install a Trojan horse program on their computer, which opens a back door that remote attackers can use to control or manipulate files on the infected system, Sophos says.

E-mail security company MessageLabs says it had intercepted more than 17,000 copies of Bagle.B worm by 10 AM EDT on Tuesday. Some of those e-mails may have been part of a spam distribution of the worm, the company says.

Network Associates says its McAfee AVERT (Antivirus Emergency Response Team) was receiving around 20 or 30 copies of the new virus each hour.

Antivirus companies including Sophos and F-Secure posted software tools and advice on how to remove Bagle.B from infected computers Tuesday.

New Netsky.B Worm Spreading on Internet

A new worm called "Netsky.B" emerged on the Internet on Wednesday, spreading by mimicking familiar e-mail addresses and enticing users to open file attachments containing malicious software, security experts said.

Most computer security companies rated the worm a medium-grade threat, describing it more of an annoyance rather than a malicious virus that destroys files or makes computer vulnerable to attacks.

"It's a very low infection rate virus," said David Perry, global education director at Trend Micro Inc., adding that newer, more infectious versions could be in the pipeline.

The worm, once activated, forwards itself to e-mail addresses found on an infected computer's hard drive.

Netsky.B usually arrives in e-mail boxes appearing as e-mail from a familiar person with an attachment that appears to be a Microsoft Word document with the words "read it immediately" or "something for you" making it tricky to identify.

Anti-virus software and services provider Network Associates Inc. said the worm's activity appeared to be concentrated in Europe, particularly the Netherlands.

Both businesses and consumers were being hit by the fast-spreading worm.

The U.S. music industry on Tuesday sued 531 more people for online copyright infringement using a method known as the "John Doe" litigation process because their names are not yet known.

The Recording Industry Association of America, which cites digital piracy as a big factor behind a three-year slump in CD sales, said it filed five separate lawsuits against 531 users of undisclosed Internet Service Providers.

The trade group filed four similar suits against 532 illegal file-shares in January.

The latest round of legal actions was filed in federal courts in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Orlando and Trenton, New Jersey.

The RIAA is using the "John Doe" method, identifying song swappers by numerical Web addresses, because it has been unable to sue suspected individual song swappers by name since mid-December, when a federal appeals court sided with Verizon Communications and ruled that ISPs did not have to respond to subpoenas filed as a prelude to lawsuits requesting the names of users.

Like the last round, the RIAA plans to discover swappers' names and locations through court-issued subpoenas.

The RIAA on Tuesday said it has begun the process of issuing subpoenas to learn the identities of 333 file-sharers targeted in the first round of John Doe suits filed in January, with the remaining batch pending before the judge.

"Legal online music services are delivering a high-quality, consumer-friendly experience, and they're attracting new fans," said Cary Sherman, RIAA president. "But they shouldn't have to compete with businesses based on illegal downloading."

In recent years, record labels and even musicians like Metallica and Sheryl Crow have campaigned against peer-to-peer networks like Napster and Kazaa, claiming they have contributed to plummeting CD sales and cheated them out of royalties by letting people swap music for free.

But in a recent burst of good news, Nielsen SoundScan, which tracks U.S. music sales, has reported that U.S. album sales so far in 2004 are up 10.4 percent from the same period a year earlier. That continues a trend that saw 2003 sales post a slower decline for the first time in three years.

AOL, EarthLink Advance 'Spam' Lawsuits

Internet providers America Online Inc. and EarthLink Inc. said separately on Wednesday that they had taken further legal steps to pursue Internet "spammers" who inundate their members with unwanted e-mail.

AOL said it had sued a company in Florida that had been dismissed from a lawsuit filed in Virginia, while EarthLink said it had uncovered the operators behind a multi-state ring responsible for some 250 million spam messages.

Both announcements advance anti-spam cases filed last year, as Internet

providers struggle to stem the tide of get-rich-quick schemes, offers for sexual aids and other unsolicited bulk messages that now account for more than half of all e-mail traffic.

AOL, a division of Time Warner Inc., initially sued Connor Miller Software Inc. in April 2003, but a federal judge said in December that Virginia courts do not have jurisdiction over the company, which is based in Winter Garden, Florida.

In a new suit filed in federal court in Orlando, Florida, AOL charged that Connor Miller helped a client inundate AOL members with 35 million "spam" messages for low-interest mortgage rates.

The company also developed software to help the client evade AOL anti-spam filters, the suit said.

Charles Henry Miller, named in the suit, said his company maintained a computer network for two men accused of spamming but did not send out any commercial e-mail.

Jonathan Beyer and Joseph Conrad, now living in Thailand, are still named as defendants in AOL's original lawsuit filed in Virginia last year.

"We did nothing as far as sending out any spam whatsoever," said Miller, who was reached by telephone.

Miller declined to comment further, citing the lawsuit.

AOL said instant-message conversations between the defendants showed the software company actively conspired in the spamming operation.

"This whole deal is gonna end up with someone in jail and everyone else's careers ruined," reads an instant message cited in the suit.

EarthLink first sued last August, charging that a multi-state marketing ring was using stolen credit-card and bank-account numbers to send out offers for sexual stimulants, dating services and do-it-yourself spam kits from hundreds of dial-up EarthLink accounts in and around Birmingham, Alabama.

But the Atlanta-based Internet provider said at the time it did not know who was behind the scheme.

According to the updated complaint, defendants include companies and individuals located in Florida, California, Tennessee, Michigan and Nevada.

Those charged could still be sending out spam as they are so adept at hiding their identities, said EarthLink Assistant General Counsel Karen Cashion.

First Major Linux 2.6 Beta Distribution Arrives

Eager and ready to get Linux 2.6 a try, but you're not a kernel hacker? Well, you don't have to wait any longer. Red Hat Inc.'s released a 2.6 distribution, the community based distribution Fedora Core 2 test 1, late last week.

Fedora, which is not supported [by] Red Hat, is an experimental distribution for Red Hat users who want to ride the bleeding edge of Linux technology. It's meant primarily for early adopters, pilot projects and developers.

This first mainstream distribution of Linux 2.6 from a major Linux distributor consists of the Linux 2.6 kernel, GNOME 2.5, and KDE 3.2. It is an early release and you can expect to find bugs. Users are requested to file bug reports to Bugzilla.

The first beta version of beta Fedora Core consists of four binary ISO and four source ISO images. It is available via ftp, from some Red Hat mirror sites, and from the Duke University Torrent system for BitTorrent users. In any case, with high demand and a payload size of 2.1GBs for the binary ISO images alone, only users with broadband and time on their hands should download the distribution.

The next version, Fedora Core 2 test2, is scheduled for release March 8, with test3 due March 28 and the final version on April 19.

Casual users, based on what eWEEK.com has seen of the first release, would be well advised to wait for the April release. Experienced Linux users won't have any trouble with the early marks of Fedora, but it is still clearly a work in progress.

For business users, since no Red Hat plans to never offer formal Web or phone support for Fedora Project distributions, Fedora should be seen as a release for getting your feet wet with 2.6, rather than as an upgrade path.

Red Hat Enterprise Linux 3.0, Red Hat's commercial distribution, has already some of Linux 2.6's best performance features, such as native POSIX threading, improved Asynchronous I/O (AIO) and an enhanced network stack. Red Hat plans to move RHEL fully to Linux 2.6 in its next release, which is now scheduled for 2005. Other enterprise Linux companies, such as Novell/SuSE, hope to release 2.6 business distributions in 2004.

The OS Formerly Known as 'Lindows'

The legal hoops keep coming for Lindows, the firm that makes a version of the Linux operating system for the desktop. In compliance with court orders in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, Lindows has changed its name to "Lin---s" -- pronounced "Lindash."

Lindows has been the subject of trademark lawsuits brought by Microsoft, which claims that the firm's name illegally appropriates a portion of the term "Windows." Courts in Sweden and the Benelux countries have agreed with Microsoft and issued temporary injunctions to prevent Lindows from distributing product under that name.

In the U.S., where Microsoft filed a suit more than three years ago, it is still uncertain whether or not "windows" can be a protected trademark. In November of 2002, a federal judge ruled Lindows had sufficiently shown that it was a generic term widely used in the 1980s.

The court denied Microsoft's request that Lindows stop using the name, but the world's biggest software company certainly is not finished trying to scupper the alleged infringement. "Microsoft is appealing to a higher

court after the latest rulings, which were damaging to their position," Lindows CEO Michael Robertson told NewsFactor. A trial is scheduled for April 7th of this year.

But name changes are the least of Lindows' worries.

Certainly, desktop Linux is getting ink in the institutional press. But pronouncements that Linux is ready to move onto the desktop are premature, even though it has a 2.8 percent market share and is ready to overtake Macintosh.

Despite the growing awareness of Linux amongst the cognoscenti, the use of the OS on the desktop is not taking hold. "That figure of 2.8 percent is still a tiny number," IDC analyst Dan Kusnetzky told NewsFactor. "Until buyers start to see Linux offered side-by-side with Windows, they've only got one of three choices: Windows, Windows or Windows."

On the street, it is the same story. In the tech-savvy San Francisco Bay Area, Linux as a Windows desktop alternative has yet to catch on.

"It's a demand question," said Faramarz Mahdavi, CEO of Pylon Solutions, an I.T. support company in San Ramon, California. "We're just not seeing any demand for Linux on the desktop," he told NewsFactor.

Nancy Maruska, the director of customer support for Hayward, California-based Progent Corporation, an I.T. service firm, says there is talk about desktop Linux. Yet, she knows of no small or mid-size business that has asked for it. "But when it comes to the techs that work for us," she told NewsFactor, "we are seeing more and more resumes with Linux experience on them."

Support firms say that installing and servicing Linux would require little effort on their part. Michael Little, who owns and operates San Francisco-based Techs-On-Call, says it would be just one more OS to support.

"Some small businesses could save six figures if they switched to Linux," he told NewsFactor. "But people are so brand conscious. I've seen freeware operating on Linux that blows Microsoft Office away, but until it starts showing up prominently in stores or ads, it's not something anyone can identify with."

That brings to the fore the question, not so much of "What's in a name?" but rather, "Where is the name placed?" For IDC's Kusnetzky, the three Windows choices are part of the problem for a company like Lindows.

Ultimately, cost is an issue. Tooling around on his calculator, Kusnetzky figures that the average small business spends - in employee time - 8.25 hours to pay for Linux software. In other words, with every 8.25 hours an employee spends on Linux-related hang-ups, the business essentially buys another copy of the OS.

This is not to say Microsoft's Windows never wasted anyone's time. But in an area where the boundary between perception and reality is murky, it is safe to assert that there have not been enough guinea pigs using Linux on the desktop to say for certain whether it will save money, time or both.

Any volunteers?

Spammers Exploit High-Speed Connections

Next time you're looking for a culprit for all that junk mail flooding your inbox, have a glance in the mirror. Spammers are increasingly exploiting home computers with high-speed Internet connections into which they've cleverly burrowed.

E-mail security companies estimate that between one-third and two-thirds of unwanted messages are relayed unwittingly by PC owners who set up software incorrectly or fail to secure their machines.

David Lawrence, 43, owns such a computer, which turned into a "spam zombie" when a virus infected it in October. Five or six spammers were using his cable modem to remotely send pitches for products like Viagra and boosters for cell phone signals.

"Spammers and the people who write these viruses ... is their life so void that they feel they have to mess up other people?" said Lawrence. "To me, it's criminal."

The self-employed businessman from Tifton, Ga., said he learned of his computer's culpability when his Internet service got suspended. "I called to find out what was going on because I knew I had the bill paid," he said.

Lawrence is by no means alone.

Hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide have been infected by SoBig and other viruses that are programmed to spawn gateways, known technically as proxies, to relay spam. Though Lawrence had antivirus software, he hadn't kept it updated.

It's ironic to the president of the security Web site myNetWatchman.com, Lawrence Baldwin, that those afflicted by spam are also often its couriers.

"That's further encouragement, justification for taking responsibility for your own system," said Baldwin. "If you don't, you can be part of the very problem you're complaining about."

Any Internet-connected computer could be running a proxy spam relay, but most of the malicious programs are written specifically for PCs that run Windows.

In the past, some spammers had sought out and exploited Internet-connected computers with misconfigured networking software. The latest and growing threat is code purposely written to create spam relay proxies as it is spread by malicious viruses.

"It's just going to get worse," said Ken Schneider, chief technology officer at spam-filtering company Brightmail Inc. "Traditionally, virus writers were driven more by reputation and trying to impress each other. Now there's an economic motive."

Just last week, a proxy program called Mitglieder began installing itself on computers infected by last month's Mydoom outbreak, said Mikko Hypponen, manager of antivirus research at F-Secure Corp. in Finland. He said such programs can also sneak in if computer owners fail to install patches to fix known Windows flaws.

The shift in spamming methods even prompted the Federal Trade Commission to issue a consumer alert last month. The advisory encouraged consumers to use antivirus and firewall programs and to check "sent mail" folders for suspicious messages.

Others say home users should also keep their Windows operating systems up to date by visiting <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com>.

"If your computer has been taken over by a spammer, you could face serious problems," the FTC advisory wrote. "Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) may prevent you from sending any e-mail at all until the virus is treated, and treatment could be a complicated, time-consuming process."

In the early days, spammers sent out junk messages directly from their machines. ISPs easily found them and closed their accounts.

Spammers then looked for so-called open relays.

These are typically mail servers at ISPs, often in Asia or South America, carelessly configured so that anyone on the Internet can send mail through them without needing a password. The relays make messages appear to have come from an ISP, not the spammer.

But ISPs and anti-spam activists soon identified many of the open-relay machines and either pressured their owners to stop or blocked messages from them.

Stymied by a more concerted effort by ISPs to lock down their Internet mail servers, the spammers turned to the less vigorously protected home machines.

They are abundant and simple to find. Spammers can cover their tracks and become virtually untraceable.

"It pains me to say it, but it's very clever of the spammer to have thought of this, getting legitimate PCs to send spam on their behalf," said Andrew Lochart, director of product marketing at e-mail security company Postini Inc.

Steve Atkins, chief technology officer at the anti-spam consultancy Word to the Wise LLC, said some ISPs continue to be plagued by open-relay techniques, but spammers generally don't bother with them anymore because it's so much easier to have success with home machines.

Where much of the spam previously flowed through China, South Korea, Brazil and other countries whose ISPs left many relays open, it's now being hastened by a North American trend: more high-speed cable and DSL connections at home.

Such proxies are especially frustrating for ISPs to identify and block, said Mary Youngblood, abuse team manager at EarthLink Inc. She said some stay open only for a few hours and disappear by the time ISPs catch on, while newer ones reconfigure themselves constantly like chameleons on a single machine.

The more versatile the open proxy, the longer it takes to isolate.

John Levine, co-author of "Fighting Spam for Dummies," said the proliferation of proxies could force ISPs to take such measures as limiting how many messages a customer can send in a given time period.

In the meantime, ISPs are often being forced to cut off their own customers.

"As a customer, to have someone just arbitrarily shut me off, that would more than mildly displease me," said Walt Wyndroski, network operations manager for CityNet, which had shut down Lawrence. "We try to think from the customer's standpoint, but we also have to look at the larger view of the health of the network itself."

U.S. Cable Modem Growth Slows

As the market for high-speed Internet connections moves into many American homes, telephone companies are finally starting to take market share from once-dominant cable companies.

The top U.S. cable operators - Comcast Corp., Time Warner Inc., Cox Communications Inc., and Charter Communications Inc. - all reported slower growth in the last quarter among new consumers signing up for high-speed Internet service.

Meanwhile, the top telephone companies offering high-speed Internet access, SBC Communications Inc. and Verizon Communications, are experiencing growth reminiscent of cable's heyday in 2002 and early 2003.

Cable still holds 64 percent of the high-speed data market, but that share may shrink in the coming year as the telcos make inroads among more price-sensitive consumers with their slower, cheaper digital subscriber line, or DSL, offerings.

"Cable still has 16 million customers and that's a great place to be, but the next wave of business becomes more difficult," said Bruce Leichtman, broadband analyst at Leichtman Research Group.

High-speed Internet is a key market for cable companies and phone companies, who see it as a high-margin business that also helps them hold onto customers of their other services.

It's not surprising that the cable industry would see a slowdown in the number of new high-speed data customers. In a sense, cable is a victim of its own success in that it quickly dominated an emerging market and has driven penetration rates close to 30 percent in some areas.

But the fourth-quarter numbers show a slowdown taking hold.

Comcast added 154,000 in the fourth quarter, down from 190,000 in the third. Likewise, Time Warner Cable's high-speed additions fell to 182,000 from 190,000 in the prior quarter. Cox's fell to 144,000 from 169,000 and Charter's to 88,000 subscribers from 140,700 in the previous quarter.

Meanwhile, SBC gained 378,000 net new subscribers in the fourth quarter from 365,000 in the third, bringing its total high speed Internet subscribers to 3.5 million.

SBC eliminated an introductory offer for most customers last fall, effectively raising prices to \$29.95 from \$26.95. In February introduced a 3 megabit per second service, as fast as most cable modems, and priced it

at \$44.95.

Like SBC, Verizon managed to increase new subscribers to 203,000 in the fourth quarter from 185,000 in the third.

As growth slows, cable companies are looking at defensive maneuvers to defend their market share.

"It's slower growth for high-speed data and they've got to go back to the drawing board and see what the next step is," said Cynthia Brumfield, analyst at independent research group Pike & Fischer.

Those include promotional pricing, add-on services, and the addition of different levels of service - known in the industry as "tiering" - all of which cut into margins.

Charter CEO Carl Vogel said the company would roll out a lower-priced high-speed data option in the second quarter to offset slowing growth.

Comcast experimented last fall with price cuts in areas where DSL providers are strong as part of its "DSL Switch Campaign."

Time Warner CEO Dick Parsons told analysts in its fourth-quarter conference call that the company would look at offers that are "off the main price plan to see how they work and how they compete with what else is in the marketplace."

Cable operators have resisted tiering because it costs roughly the same to provide a slower connection as a fast one.

But in Canada, where high-speed data penetration is higher, tiering is becoming the norm. Top cable operators Rogers Communications Inc. and Shaw Communications Inc. have both implemented tiered service.

Both Canadian operators have higher high-speed data penetration rates than their U.S. counterparts but not by much.

Rogers provides high-speed data to 34 percent of its basic cable subscribers and Shaw to 45 percent. This compares to 25 percent for Comcast, 29 percent for Time Warner, and 31 percent for Cox.

Program Teaches Kids Internet Safety

A new interactive computer program offers kids a way to protect themselves from Internet predators.

Gov. Benson, Attorney General Peter Heed and Education Commissioner Nicholas Donohue on Wednesday unveiled the program known as NetSmartz Workshop to educate children about the dangers of the Internet.

"It feels to the kids like a computer game," said Jenn Gillins, of NetSmartz.

A recent study showed one in five kids receive a sexual solicitation over the Internet. One in four were exposed to unwanted pictures of nudity or sexual activity while online last year.

While police will continue to search out Internet predators, Heed said knowledge is the best defense for our children.

The NetSmartz Workshop computer program will be sent to seven schools in the state as part of a pilot program.

"They're going to help other schools learn how to use the program," said Gillins, who will train the teachers.

In addition, parents at home and teachers at any school will be able to download the program and related materials from a new Web site.

"This is something we need to do as a state," Benson said. Children often are more savvy about using computers than adults but remain naive about ways people may try to take advantage of them, he said.

The NetSmartz program was developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

The program uses computer animation and games to teach children about Internet hazards. Children learn not to give out personal information online and to be wary of strangers they meet in chatrooms. It encourages children to talk to a trusted adult if they encounter something online that upsets them.

The program offers four levels for different ages from kindergarten to high school. For older teens, the program uses personal stories from kids who were victims of predators they met over the Internet.

"Hopefully, it'll be a wake-up call to teenagers," Gillins said.

Teachers and parents can download supplemental activities to reinforce the lessons.

"We hope every community in New Hampshire eventually participates," said Donohue.

Firms Ignore Kids-Only Internet Domain

When Congress cordoned off an Internet playground for children, supporters hoped it would give young surfers the benefits of the World Wide Web without its many dangers. But more than a year after President Bush signed the "dot-kids" legislation into law, the online haven looks more like a ghost town than the theme park envisioned by its backers.

A little more than 1,500 people have plunked down \$100 to \$160 to buy a dot-kids address since the addresses went on sale last June, but only eight are attached to live Web sites. Twelve sites have been submitted for a mandatory content review.

That compares to the more than 2 million dot-info and dot-biz addresses, two domains that were only added to the Internet's addressing system in 2001.

Even the dot-kids law's most ardent supporters concede that they're far from reaching their goal.

"The reality is I have to get more engaged and keep pushing it if we want to be successful," said Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.).

Shimkus, who sponsored the dot-kids bill in the House of Representatives, said he will continue to promote the child-friendly domain, urging its adoption by family-focused entertainment giants like The Walt Disney Co. and Viacom International Inc., which owns the Nickelodeon cable network.

There is no actual dot-kids domain; instead it is a subsection of America's dot-us domain, which is run under contract by Sterling, Va.-based NeuStar Inc. A typical dot-kids domain name would be something like washingtonpost.kids.us.

The Smithsonian Institution and the state of Minnesota have acquired and launched dot-kids sites. Another adopter is Summum, a Utah-based nonprofit company that advocates mummification as an alternative to embalming.

But to date there are no dot-kids Web sites dedicated to soccer, dinosaurs, cartoons or other topics dear to kids' hearts. Melinda Clem, NeuStar's director of business development, said dot-kids must garner "broad representation" to reach its goal.

"There's no child who's really going to want to stay there," Clem said, though she predicted that dot-kids will reach the "critical mass" of Web sites to hold children's interest and attract parents.

Others are less optimistic.

"With all the limitations on it now I don't think it's going anywhere," said David Sorkin, a professor at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago specializing in Internet policy.

Sorkin operates law.kids.us, one of the 12 sites that has been submitted to NeuStar for content review. NeuStar reviewers rejected Sorkin's first version because it contained the text of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on comedian George Carlin's "Filthy Words" monologue. Sorkin has not decided whether to appeal the decision.

Sorkin said his primary motivation for buying the domain name was to study the evolution of dot-kids, but his experience with law.kids.us reinforced his pessimism about the concept of a child-friendly Internet domain.

That pessimism, he said, comes from the numerous restrictions and requirements that are placed on dot-kids Web sites. Sites must meet strict content restrictions that bar sexuality, violence and profanity. They are not permitted to gather information from visitors nor are they allowed to include chat rooms or links to sites outside of kids.us.

Buying a dot-kids domain name also is relatively expensive. Smart shoppers can buy a dot-com address for a little more than the wholesale price of \$6 per year. Dot-kids addresses carry a \$60 wholesale annual price tag and can cost customers as much as \$160, Clem said. The content review costs an extra \$250 a year, bringing the yearly outlay to \$410.

"You're not going to see thousands of sites created overnight at that price," said Sorkin, adding that the lack of interesting options will do little to spur children to spend time surfing the domain and give parents little incentive to persuade their children to do so.

Clem argued that the price is not prohibitive for multimillion-dollar

corporations like Disney, and she said the higher registration fees offset the cost of scouring the domain for offending material.

Christian Zouzas, a real estate attorney who owns three of the eight active dot-kids sites and is planning to launch a dozen more, said that the domain's value will improve with a couple of big names in children's entertainment joining the dot-kids ranks.

"I think it's absolutely needed, with so much going on with all the other extensions," Zouzas said. "You know as a parent that the content there is going to be suitable."

Interest appears to be growing. The Walt Disney Co. plans to start a dot-kids Web site but has not made a proposal to NeuStar, said spokeswoman Kim Kerscher.

PBS spokesman Kevin Dando said the nonprofit broadcasting organization will submit its Web site contents to NeuStar for review on Friday. The site would contain content from its member stations' children's programs like "Arthur," "Barney" and "Sesame Street."

Nickelodeon has registered two Web sites in the domain and plans to have live content on them by the end of the year, said General Manager Mike Skagerlind.

America Online hosts a large children's section on its closed network and would not rule out a dot-kids Web site, but the company will not disclose its future plans, said spokesman Nicholas Graham.

Donna Rice Hughes, president of children's safety Web site Enough Is Enough, said NeuStar should drop the dot-kids price and market it more aggressively.

"It's really the private sector that needs to take up the slack and do the public relations, do the marketing and get the exposure," Hughes said.

Clem said that more private-sector promotion would be helpful but the responsibility falls to the Internet registrars - companies that sell Internet addresses to the public. As a wholesale "registry," NeuStar does not typically promote domain names to the public, she said.

Registrars have not embraced the dot-kids business. Compared to the more than 100 companies that sell dot-com names, only 16 registrars are authorized to sell dot-kids names.

Register.com, one of the largest Internet registrars, offers the addresses through its corporate services division, primarily as a tool to let companies protect their trademarked names from misuse by unscrupulous Internet users.

"Of the names that our customers have registered, none of them are live and I don't know if that's because they're having difficulty going through the process or because maybe brand protection was their real goal," said Register.com spokeswoman Stephanie Marks.

Elliot Noss, chief executive of Tucows Inc., a Toronto-based registrar, said he passed on offering dot-kids addresses after his customers - mostly Internet service providers and Web hosting companies that resell domain names - seemed uninterested.

"They all knew it was coming down the pipe, they were all aware of it," Noss said. "We tend to have a couple people asking about anything, but with this there was virtually no interest."

Google Archive Exceeds 6 Billion Items

Google, the most widely used search engine in the U.S. and among English speakers worldwide, has reached a milestone of sorts now that its index of Internet items has surpassed the 6 billion mark, the company has announced.

Google's index had about 4.5 billion items in August 2003, according to a company spokesperson.

"This represents steady improvement as we keep on adding pages. We want to index all the worthwhile pages out there," says Peter Norvig, director of search quality at the Mountain View, California, company. Along with growing the index, Google also continually refines its ranking algorithms in order to serve up query results that are as relevant as possible to the user's search, he says.

Google is doing a good job of both growing its index and maintaining query-result relevance, an analyst says.

"There's no doubt that Google is where it is due to the quality and relevance of its search results," says Graham Mudd, a comScore Networks analyst. "Continuing to increase the number and types of items a search engine can be used for can only help in this regard."

The 6 billion items include about 4.28 billion Web pages, 880 million images, and 845 million Usenet messages, Google says.

A growing category is book-related information pages, including first chapters, reviews and bibliographic information. Google retrieves book-related items through its Google Print service, which is in test mode.

Google's index had about 3.3 billion Web pages in August 2003 and about 400 million images in November 2002, the most recent years in which those items were counted, the spokesperson says.

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